

# 2012 Legislative Review

## Richard DeBolt & Gary Alexander



**20th District  
State  
Representatives**



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The legislative sessions finally adjourned April 11 after many weeks of long hours of negotiating a final compromise on a budget and much-needed government reforms. With the sessions now behind us we look forward to spending the upcoming months visiting with folks in our local communities and listening to your thoughts and ideas.

This newsletter provides a brief glimpse of the major issues we dealt with during the legislative sessions. As always, we appreciate hearing your comments and encourage you to contact us with your concerns.

Remember, even when we aren't in session our job is to serve you. Please contact us if you need assistance navigating the bureaucracy of state government.

Thank you for the honor of serving you,

Rep. Richard DeBolt

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## OPERATING BUDGET

It wasn't an easy road, but after a special session in December, the 60-day regular session and another 31 days in special session, the Legislature finally broke through the one-party control in Olympia to close a \$1 billion budget gap and adopt much-needed government reforms. After the bipartisan coalition in the Senate formed a philosophical majority, Republicans were brought to the negotiating table for the first time in many years. Rep. Alexander, the House Republican budget leader, was instrumental in bringing forth common-sense solutions at each and every meeting. He also brought the art of listening - something absent at many legislative sessions, which helped them reach a consensus on several contentious issues.

As a result, the budget includes our priorities of funding education, protecting our most vulnerable citizens and public safety. The final budget does **not** include a sales tax increase, as proposed by the governor and Democrats, and it does not delay payments to schools or eliminate levy funds to rural school districts, as proposed in the House and Senate Democratic budgets.

The budget is a good compromise, but we still have concerns with the final product. Our main concern is that it only leaves \$319 million in reserves. This is worrisome given the volatility of tax collections. We would have preferred to have a much higher ending fund balance. We are also concerned that it continues to keep programs like general assistance unemployment (GAU) on "life-support" when the state can no longer afford them, and when there are similar programs at the federal level to fill the need of many currently enrolled in GAU. In the end however, the good outweighed the bad, which is why we supported the budget in its final form.

## Government reforms will improve state's financial footing



The Legislature adopted important reforms that will offer long-term benefits to taxpayers and public employees and help put state government on more stable financial ground.

- **Senate Bill 6378:** Public employees hired as of May 2013 will receive a smaller monthly benefit if they choose to retire early. This will save public employers and taxpayers around \$1.3 billion over the next 25 years.
- **Senate Bill 6636:** This measure will require operating budgets to balance across four years instead of the current two-year requirement. This means that any operating budget being adopted by the Legislature must balance in the current two-year budget cycle – and also in the following two-year cycle. Washington is the first state to enact this important measure. Requiring state lawmakers to take into account the long-term cost of the policies they are enacting will help prevent unsustainable budgets in the future.
- **Senate Bill 5940:** This bill is perhaps one of the most contentious and most misunderstood bills of the session. Currently many public-school teachers and classified staff must purchase their health-care insurance from a single carrier, through their school district. That lack of choice is a factor in why the premiums for family-level coverage have become unaffordable for some. SB 5940 will require districts to: disclose expenses, reserves, fees, premium costs and so on; allow open contracting; provide greater equity between the cost of coverage for an individual and the cost of family coverage; and give employees access to high-deductible health plans and health savings accounts. Districts that don't comply with these standards by December 2015 would be forced to join the insurance pool to which general-government employees have belonged for many years.
- **House Bill 2834:** This bill will provide cost savings to local governments by eliminating some of their duplicative and unnecessary reporting requirements. It also requires the state to further identify reports, programs and mandates that can be eliminated in order to save money for city and county governments. (Prime sponsored by Rep. Alexander)

## Let's get Washington working again!

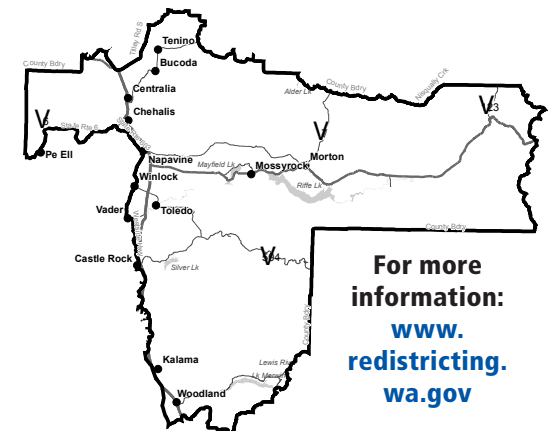
If we are going to get people back to work, state government needs to become more collaborative and less punitive when working with job providers. We must reduce burdensome and costly regulations on employers, and ensure consistency and predictability so they have the confidence to hire new employees and retain those currently employed. The following job-creation measures are a few of the workable solutions we supported to provide momentum for economic recovery and enhanced revenue growth for Washington. Unfortunately the majority party failed to consider them.



- **Suspend GMA requirements in counties with significant and persistent unemployment (House Bill 1592)** – Alleviate the cost and bureaucracy of controlling growth when none is occurring and when those regulations stand in the way of badly needed economic development.
- **Require permit decisions in 90 days (House Bill 1961)** – Require agencies to make permit decisions in 90 days or it is granted. This would add certainty and eliminate unnecessary delays in permit decisions in order to significantly stimulate economic activity. Let's free up those who are ready to put people to work.
- **Moratorium on rulemaking (House Bill 1156)** – We support the governor's decision to suspend unnecessary rulemaking and would extend the moratorium for three years or until state revenue growth shows evidence of economic recovery.
- **Reclassify hydropower as renewable energy (House Bill 1125)** – When we sell our inexpensive hydro power to California, it qualifies as renewable. In Washington it does not. Let's recapture our state's competitive advantage of offering abundant, affordable clean energy for manufacturers and consumers.

## Redistricting changes the 20<sup>th</sup> District

Every 10 years following the Census, the bipartisan Washington State Redistricting Commission convenes to redraw the state's legislative and congressional district lines. The process ensures all Washington citizens are fairly represented. The newly-drawn maps changed the 20<sup>th</sup> District. The district now stretches farther south and the northern portion of Thurston County is now in the 2<sup>nd</sup> District. As a result of these changes, Rep. Alexander now resides in the 2<sup>nd</sup> District. We have been honored to work together as a team and look forward to continuing our work together - just not as 20<sup>th</sup> District seatmates. Members will represent their current districts until after the 2012 elections and they take the oath of office in January 2013.



For more information:  
[www.  
redistricting.  
wa.gov](http://www.redistricting.wa.gov)

